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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 52 of Security Council resolution 2348 (2017). It covers major developments that have occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the issuance of my previous report, of 30 June 2017 (S/2017/565). The report describes progress in the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); provides an overview of political developments following my report of 15 August on the implementation of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016 (see S/2017/712); provides updates on the implementation of recommendations to adjust the Mission's posture with respect to supporting the political transition, its preparedness to address security risks and to monitor and report on human rights violations and abuses; and outlines the assessment of the performance of MONUSCO uniformed personnel in protecting civilians.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

2. The implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016 continued to be characterized by significant divisions among its signatories. As attention has shifted from the establishment and operationalization of inclusive transitional institutions to the organization of elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission indicated that holding elections by December 2017, as stipulated in the agreement, might not be possible for technical reasons. Against this background, the climate of political uncertainty that had marked the end of Joseph Kabila's second and final term as President in December 2016 is gradually re-emerging.

3. On 2 August 2017, a delegation of the opposition platform, Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales de la République démocratique du Congo acquises au changement, submitted to the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Corneille Nangaa, a memorandum, in which the delegation, inter alia, requested the publication of the electoral calendar by 1 September. The President of the Commission informed the delegation that an electoral calendar would be

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published by the end of August. However, in a subsequent intervention on social media, Mr. Nangaa indicated that the date of the publication of the electoral calendar would be communicated following a joint assessment by the Commission, the Government and the National Council for Monitoring the Agreement and the Electoral Process.

4. From 28 to 31 August, in Kananga, Kasai Central Province, the Independent National Electoral Commission convened a meeting of representatives of the aforementioned organs to assess the electoral process and make recommendations prior to the publication of the electoral calendar. Participants included Mr. Nangaa, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, on behalf of the Government, and Adolphe Lumanu, a member of the Majorité présidentielle party and Vice-President of the National Council for Monitoring the Agreement and the Electoral Process. Members of Parliament, civil society representatives, members of the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel et de la communication, the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and representatives of Zambia, South Africa, the African Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie also attended the meeting. MONUSCO participated in the meeting as an observer. In the final communiqué of the meeting, issued on 31 August, it was noted that the security situation in the provinces of Kasai and Kasai Central and the territories of Luilu and Kamiji in Lomami Province had improved; that the training of local Commission agents, the deployment of registration material and voter registration in those areas were to commence on 4 September; that Parliament needed to urgently adopt the requisite electoral legislation and the draft organic law on the organization and functioning of the National Council during the ordinary session scheduled to begin on 15 September; and that a realistic electoral calendar would be published without further delay.

5. On 9 September, the President chaired an inter-institutional meeting in Kinshasa to assess progress in the electoral process. The President of the Independent National Electoral Commission explained that, while approximately 99 per cent of the estimated electorate had already been registered, the lack of the requisite legislation, logistical means and funding impeded further progress on the electoral process. Mr. Nangaa affirmed that the diaspora would be given the opportunity to register, adding that some technical and financial issues had to be solved first. He reiterated the Commission's intention to publish a realistic electoral calendar in the near future, which would take into account the technical, operational and financial aspects of organizing the elections.

6. Political demonstrations continued, with protests and general strikes remaining the main mobilization tools of the Rassemblement. The Rassemblement and its civil society allies called for a general strike on 8 and 9 August. The strike was mostly observed in Kinshasa and Uvira, and partially in Goma, Matadi and Mbuji-Mayi, but not in other provinces. Pre-emptive deployments of the Congolese National Police were observed in several major urban centres. Continuing restrictions on civil and political liberties, including a partial interruption of social media, and the weak mobilization capacity of the Rassemblement contributed to the limited observation of the general strike.

7. On 8 August, the President of the Rassemblement, Félix Tshisekedi, encouraged the Congolese population to prepare for civil disobedience "until victory", adding that it was time for the people to overthrow the "irresponsible regime". On 9 August, the Groupe des sept partis politiques subplatform of the Rassemblement called on civil society actors to mobilize throughout the country by organizing acts of civil disobedience starting on 1 October if by that time the Independent National Electoral Commission had not convened the electorate for

presidential elections. On 20 August, the Rassemblement adopted a road map of action towards the full implementation of the agreement of 31 December 2016, including the convocation of the electorate by the end of September for elections by December and the subsequent departure of President Kabila.

8. Meanwhile, on 10 August, an ad hoc working group composed of prominent civil society organizations issued its sixth report on the implementation of the agreement of 31 December 2016. In the report, the working group noted the lack of political will to implement the agreement and cited the shared responsibility of the signatories for the political crisis, noting the dominance of the ruling majority on the political scene, a divided opposition and a marginalized civil society. The working group underlined the need to adopt a consensual electoral timeline, in accordance with the political agreement, prioritizing presidential elections. On 18 August, 32 representatives of civil society organizations met in Paris and signed a "Manifesto of the Congolese Citizen", calling upon the Congolese people to take non-violent action to force President Kabila to step down if elections are not held by December 2017. Leaders of the Rassemblement expressed support for the manifesto.

9. On 21 August, Mr. Tshisekedi met the former governor of Katanga Province and aspiring presidential candidate, Moïse Katumbi, in New York. In a subsequent media interview, both politicians underlined that the agreement of 31 December 2016 was the only way forward and rejected any possibility of a third dialogue. Both strongly refuted reports of the possible appointment of Mr. Tshisekedi to the Government as Prime Minister.

10. In the period under review, progress was made on updating the voter register. As at 10 September, the Independent National Electoral Commission had registered over 41 million voters; women represented 48 per cent of registered voters. On 4 September, voter registration training began in Kasai and Kasai Central Provinces, and in the Kamiji and Luilu territories of Lomami Province. On 12 September, 30 voter registration centres opened in the cities of Tshikapa, Kasai Province, and Kananga, Kasai Central Province.

11. While progress on the presidential, national legislative and provincial legislative elections foreseen in the political agreement remained slow, the Independent National Electoral Commission organized partial gubernatorial elections, following a wave of no-confidence motions tabled in several provincial assemblies. On 26 August, a first round of partial gubernatorial elections, through indirect voting by the provincial assemblies, was held in eight provinces: Bas-Uélé, Haut-Katanga, Haut-Lomami, Kwilu, South Kivu, Sud-Ubangi, Tshopo and Tshuapa. A second round was held in three provinces on 29 August. Candidates of the Majorité présidentielle party and independent candidates reportedly sponsored by the Majorité présidentielle prevailed in seven of the eight provinces.

12. The multi-partner basket support fund for the Projet d'appui au cycle électoral au Congo, managed by the United Nations Development Programme, remains funded at only 6 per cent of the $123.3 million required, in part owing to donor concerns regarding uncertainties surrounding the political transition.

13. MONUSCO continues to support the National Oversight Mechanism in the implementation of national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to stress the need for steady progress on both national and regional commitments by all signatories. My report on the implementation of the Framework (S/2017/825) provides further details on progress on those commitments.

Economic developments

14. The downward macroeconomic trend persisted, with high inflation and a depreciation of the Congolese franc by 27 per cent since January 2017. However, the Banque centrale du Congo managed to stabilize the exchange rate at 1,560 Congolese francs to the dollar by late July. In a letter sent on 4 July to the diplomatic missions of some Western countries and international institutions, the Prime Minister, Bruno Tshibala, asked for international financial assistance to overcome the economic crisis. The country continued to experience diminished purchasing power due to high inflation, which spilled over into labour unrest. Following a strike on 21 July by medical personnel in Kinshasa, the Conseil des professeurs d'université au Congo initiated an unlimited strike on 28 July, demanding the readjustment of their salaries to the current exchange rate, and similar action was announced by primary and secondary school teachers. On 17 August, the Prime Minister concluded an agreement with the Intersyndicale nationale de la fonction publique to set the exchange rate for public sector salaries at 1,130 Congolese francs to the dollar, as compared with the previous rate of 930 francs. On 14 August, during a Council of Ministers meeting chaired by the President, the Government announced a series of measures aimed at improving the collection of State revenues and reducing customs fraud and tax evasion.

B. Security situation

15. Against the backdrop of an uncertain and complex political transition, the security situation deteriorated further in many areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with a major trend: an increase in the targeting of security forces, mainly the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), by Mai-Mai groups. In North Kivu, there were repeated attacks by Mai-Mai groups on FARDC positions amid continuing violence between Hutu and Nande communities during the reporting period. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) also attempted to overrun some FARDC positions. In South Kivu, Mai-Mai groups staged attacks against FARDC troops in several strategic locations in late June. In Tanganyika Province, there were renewed clashes between Twa and Luba militia amid a possible resurgence of Mai-Mai Kata-Katanga and emerging splits between various Twa militia factions. The western part of the country also remained volatile, with a major clash between the Bundu Dia Mayala politico-religious sect and security forces in Kinshasa and Kongo Central and sporadic violence in the three provinces of the Kasai region, notably clashes between Kamuina Nsapu militia and security forces, and between ethnic militia groups.

16. The situation in some border areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained of concern, with reports of South Sudanese armed groups taking positions on the border between Haut-Uélé Province and South Sudan, as well as reports of an incursion of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) into north-eastern Ituri in late August. Meanwhile, refugees continued to arrive in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fleeing conflict in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. The situation in Kasai Province also contributed to movements of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Angola, with a few spontaneous returns.

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

17. In North Kivu Province, FARDC troops were intensively targeted by armed groups and sustained heavy losses. In Rutshuru territory, on 6 July, Nyatura attacked FARDC troops, killing four soldiers and injuring three others. On 11 July, Mai-Mai Charles attacked FARDC positions in Nyamilima, killing five soldiers and injuring

eight others and two civilians. On 29 July, Mai-Mai Charles ambushed FARDC troops in Nyamilima, leaving six soldiers dead and 11 wounded. In another ambush on 2 August, Mai-Mai Mazembe elements shot a high-ranking FARDC officer. Other armed group alliances, notably the Mouvement national pour le renouveau, have been systematically targeting FARDC and national police positions in the Grand Nord of North Kivu. In support to efforts by FARDC to regain control of the situation, MONUSCO conducted patrols in the affected areas and increased collaboration with the local authorities and civil society through the community alert networks.

18. Similarly, in Masisi territory, the Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain attacked two FARDC positions, killing two soldiers. MONUSCO intensified its patrols and encouraged FARDC to reinforce its positions. In Walikale, on 16 July, a coalition of Alliance, Conseil national pour le renouveau et la démocratie and Nyatura elements attacked an FARDC camp, making an incursion in western Kitchanga, prompting the population to seek refuge around a MONUSCO base.

19. Ethnic killings and abductions were also recurrent. In Rutshuru territory, Nyatura abducted 14 Nande civilians on 3 July. In Masisi territory, Nyatura elements beheaded a Hunde man at his farm on 8 July. Nyatura also abducted a Hutu chief in Tongo on 12 July, and nine civilians in Kanyobagonga on 13 July. MONUSCO successfully facilitated talks between Nande and Hutu communities and managed, in collaboration with FARDC, to secure the release of all the abductees.

20. In Beni territory, the lull in brutal attacks by ADF on civilians continued. There was, however, an increase in the number of abductions of civilians and attacks on the armed forces by ADF. On 12 August, alleged ADF elements, well equipped and wearing new FARDC uniforms, attacked four FARDC positions approximately 30 km from Oicha. At least 14 FARDC elements were killed and three wounded. The assailants also took away FARDC weaponry. The change in the modus operandi of ADF, from avoiding contact with FARDC to direct attacks on troops, could be connected to a shared interest between some ADF commanders and resurgent Mai-Mai groups, whose recent focus has been on attacks on State armed forces and symbols. On 17 September, one Tanzanian peacekeeper was killed and another injured in clashes between a joint FARDC-MONUSCO patrol and suspected ADF elements in Mamudioma.

21. Meanwhile, security concerns remained high in the town of Beni and Butembo. On 16 July, unidentified armed men kidnapped two Catholic priests near Butembo and demanded a ransom of $15,000 for their release. In addition, on 7 August, Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové abducted some 65 civilians near Lubero. In Lubero territory, Mai-Mai groups were increasingly active; most notably, clashes between Mai-Mai Mazembe and Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové displaced over 16,000 people. From 29 July to 4 August, in Kirumba, a delegation of the provincial government, with MONUSCO support, engaged without success in talks with the two armed groups.

22. In South Kivu Province, the resurgence of Mai-Mai Yakutumba and its temporary capture of FARDC positions near the gold mining town of Misisi in late June led to the displacement of 80,000 people. FARDC managed to repulse the armed group with the support of MONUSCO. Mai-Mai Yakutumba has, however, consolidated its position and control over a significant stretch of the shoreline of Lake Tanganyika, engaging in piracy operations and accelerating smuggling activities, which further contribute to strengthening the armed group. The Mission dispatched two standing combat deployments to support the protection of civilians and facilitated the deployment of the national police in the area.

23. Along the border with Burundi, FARDC troops arrested around 50 foreign combatants, originating from the Forces nationales de libération du Burundi, the Forces républicaines du Burundi and the Résistance pour un état de droit au Burundi, which are loosely aligned with Congolese Banyamulenge Tutsi "Gumino" fighters in the Hauts Plateaux region of South Kivu. This network of armed groups is competing with Mai-Mai Yakutumba for control of gold mining deposits in the south of the province.

24. In other developments in South Kivu, on 28 July, 37 prisoners escaped from the Bukavu central prison following the explosion of a hand grenade. MONUSCO assisted the authorities in securing the perimeter and preventing further escapes.

25. On 15 September, Congolese security forces forcibly repatriated four Burundian asylum seekers accused of conducting illegal armed patrols around refugee sites in Kamanyola, Walungu territory, South Kivu. On the same date, Burundian asylum seekers and refugees protested against the repatriation in front of a post of intelligence services in Kamanyola. One FARDC soldier was killed in clashes between the refugees and security forces. The armed forces and national police opened fire on the protesters, resulting in 39 refugees killed and over 117 others injured. Six FARDC soldiers and four national police officers were also injured. Refugees sought shelter around a MONUSCO forward base in the area, and the Mission provided medical assistance to the wounded. The authorities opened an investigation into the incident. MONUSCO is also conducting an inquiry into the response of its peacekeepers, and the Security Council will be informed of its outcome.

26. In Tanganyika Province, the threat of Mai-Mai Yakutumba in the Bendera area, near the border with South Kivu, decreased following operations by FARDC, supported by MONUSCO. However, the level of violence in several areas of the province remains of concern. The conflict between Luba and Twa militias escalated in Kalemie territory, especially in Lambo Kilela, Lukwangulu and Mulonge, where 73 people died and 25 were injured during clashes. Twa militiamen allegedly raped 32 women between June and August 2017 in Nyunzu territory. Mai-Mai Kata-Katanga elements formerly loyal to the warlord Gédéon Kyungu Mutanga, who surrendered in 2016, are mobilizing from their locations in Mitwaba, Moba and Pweto against government security forces. Mai-Mai Kata-Katanga elements are also mobilizing against the Twa near Moba, signalling a deepening level of complexity and interwoven community conflicts emerging in the province. The increased resort to force by provincial authorities in addressing the Twa-Luba conflict has compounded the humanitarian situation. By the end of July, more than 565,000 people had been displaced in the province, representing an increase of 60,000 people compared with the first quarter of the year. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 52 per cent of the internally displaced people are women.

27. In Ituri Province, the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) remained the greatest threat to civilians, accounting for 90 per cent of human rights abuses documented in July in South Irumu territory. A joint MONUSCO-FARDC operation from 13 to 23 July resulted in the killing of two senior FRPI officers. On 14 July, in Mambasa territory, an unidentified Mai-Mai group killed four rangers of the Okapi nature reserve escorting foreign journalists, who escaped unharmed. Following a rise in violent intercommunal incidents and land disputes, Hema and Lendu leaders in Djugu territory agreed on 14 July to establish a commission, overseen by the provincial government and supported by MONUSCO, to address the sources of tension.

28. In Haut-Uélé Province, the withdrawal of United States special forces and the drawdown of the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army have made it difficult for FARDC to repel infiltration by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from the Central African Republic. In July, LRA systematically attacked and abducted civilians in artisanal mining areas close to main roads and towns. MONUSCO supported FARDC in conducting enhanced patrols. As a result, LRA partially withdrew towards the Central African Republic, but maintained a reduced presence west of Garamba National Park. MONUSCO is also investigating reports of the presence of South Sudanese armed groups in different locations in Haut-Uélé and the northern part of Ituri, as well as the reported incursion of SPLA elements into northern Ituri in late August.

Western Democratic Republic of the Congo

29. There was a relative lull in fighting in the Kasai region during the reporting period, despite periodic instances of serious violence, such as in Tshikapa, Kasai Province, and in the Luiza territory of Kasai Central Province, and women and children continued to account for a significant portion of the victims. The violence in the Kasai region has resulted in over 1.4 million internally displaced people, most of whom are women and children, and 31,700 Congolese refugees in Angola, some of whom have been gradually returning. These returnees have, at times, provoked violent community tensions, given the increasingly ethnically charged environment in the Kasai region. Operations by national security forces continued in territories across four provinces: in the Luebo and Kamonia territories of Kasai, in the Dimbelenge and Luiza territories of Kasai Central, in Kabeya-Kamwanga, Miabi and Tshilenge in Kasai Oriental and in Mwene-Ditu in Lomami. In Kalala-Diboko, Luiza territory, 67 Kamuina Nsapu elements and civilians were allegedly killed during operations by national security forces.

30. Ethnically based violence continued, with clashes between Kamuina Nsapu, some of whom have an allegiance to the Luba and Lulua communities, and the emerging Bana Mura militia, generally comprising individuals from the Tshokwe, Pende and Tetela ethnic groups. Clashes took place in the Kamonia and Luiza territories of Kasai Central. The Bana Mura militia, which has received some support from prominent political figures in Kasai, was allegedly armed and supported by national security forces and local chiefs. The risk of spillover of ethnic tensions from the Kasai provinces remains acute, with continued clashes between various ethnic militias, initially triggered by the original conflict involving Kamuina Nsapu, which have disrupted the delicate ethnic balance in the region.

31. On 19 September, the President chaired the opening ceremony of a three-day reconciliation forum for the Kasai region, which was attended by several Congolese stakeholders. Some opposition members declined to take part in the forum, arguing that identifying the perpetrators of the violence in the region was the prerequisite for commencing a reconciliation process.

32. Following the Makala prison break in Kinshasa on 17 May, insecurity has increased, not only in Kinshasa, but also in neighbouring areas. On 14 July, unknown elements attacked the Kinshasa Central Market, killing its administrator and four police officers. MONUSCO documented several other attacks on detention facilities attached to tribunals and some police stations in Kinshasa after the prison break.

33. On 7 August, Bundu Dia Mayala elements carried out attacks and demonstrations in Kinshasa and Kongo Central, targeting sensitive installations, but were successfully repulsed by national security forces. MONUSCO documented at least 43 killings in different locations in Kinshasa in this context.

Humanitarian situation

34. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, approximately 8.5 million persons, including 5.5 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance — a 16 per cent increase since January 2017. The number of internally displaced people has reached 3.8 million, and close to 621,700 Congolese nationals have sought refuge in countries of the subregion. Moreover, the Democratic Republic of the Congo currently hosts some 541,400 refugees from neighbouring countries. Some 7.7 million people face acute hunger, a 30 per cent increase since 2016, and 43 per cent of children under the age of 5 are chronically malnourished.

35. In the Kasai region, some 2.8 million people are facing critical levels of food insecurity, an increase of 600 per cent between June 2016 and June 2017. Over 1.5 million children in the Kasai region continue to endure the risks of violence, displacement and loss of access to health and education. The prospect of waterborne diseases in the upcoming rainy season remains a serious risk for the displaced population. As of September, 31,700 refugees from the Kasai region were registered in Angola. The security situation in the region has significantly impeded humanitarian access, affecting both the delivery of assistance and the verification of information. Agencies are scaling up and prioritizing the response in the region. However, as at 25 August, the total funding received for the Kasai response stood at $23.7 million, representing 37 per cent of the $64.5 million requested in the flash appeal launched for the complex emergency in the Kasai region. As of September, funding for the humanitarian response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained at 27 per cent of the $812.6 million needed for 2017.

Human rights situation

36. MONUSCO documented 1,329 human rights violations and abuses committed from June to August, compared with the 1,444 incidents recorded during the period from March to May. About 73 per cent of those violations and abuses occurred in conflict-affected provinces. Armed groups perpetrated 533 human rights abuses, while State agents were responsible for 796 violations, with 27 per cent attributed to FARDC and 24 per cent to the national police. At least 347 victims of extrajudicial and arbitrary killings, including 31 women and 58 children, were registered during the period under review. Armed groups killed 208 people, including 23 women and 12 children, while State agents killed 139 people, including 8 women and 46 children.

37. Democratic space continued to shrink, with violations of civil and political rights, particularly the freedoms of peaceful assembly, of opinion and of expression. MONUSCO documented 247 cases of human rights violations linked to restrictions of democratic space throughout the country from June to August, compared with 245 in the previous three-month period. Of those, five human rights violations were perpetrated in the context of voter registration operations, by national police force officers assigned to secure registration centres, mainly relating to rapes of women trying to register.

38. Some journalists, political opponents and civil society activists remained the targets of threats, harassment and violence. Demonstrations staged by civil society on 31 July against delays in the publication of the electoral calendar were banned by local authorities in at least five localities, including Beni and Butembo, North Kivu Province, Bunia, Ituri Province, Lubumbashi, Haut-Katanga Province, and Mbuji-Mayi, Kasai Oriental Province, amid heavy deployment of national security forces. At least 131 persons, including several journalists, were arrested throughout the country. Five of them remain in detention. On 7 August, prior to the two-day general strike announced by the Rassemblement, the use of social media was restricted until 11 August.

39. MONUSCO continued to address serious crimes committed by armed groups and security forces against the civilian population through its Prosecution Support Cells. During the reporting period, support to military justice from such cells resulted in 23 convictions, including that of Jules Becker, an FARDC colonel sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for war crimes.

40. Joint investigation missions continued in some parts of the country and resulted in the indictment of at least 50 FARDC soldiers and 14 national police force officers for their involvement in human rights violations and war crimes. However, in the Kasai region, procedural concerns continued to hamper MONUSCO support to military justice in ongoing investigations. On 4 and 5 July, MONUSCO and national authorities jointly identified an additional 38 mass graves in the Kasai region, bringing the total number of mass graves discovered since the beginning of the conflict in the region to 87.

41. MONUSCO continued to provide support to national security forces, in line with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. Steps are under way, at Headquarters, to review that support and adjust it as appropriate, especially in view of the increasing involvement of FARDC and the national police in human rights violations.

Sexual violence

42. At least 195 persons, including 120 women, 27 men and 48 children, were reported as victims of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by State agents (20 per cent of all reported conflict-related sexual violence) and armed groups (80 per cent) between June and August, which represents an increase compared with the last reporting period. Among State agents, members of FARDC remained the main perpetrators, with about 18 per cent of violations. Inter-ethnic violence in Tanganyika Province between Twa and Luba communities resulted in at least 99 of those victims of sexual violence, including the 27 men.

Child protection

43. Through the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, MONUSCO verified 613 such violations in conflict-affected areas from June to August, an increase compared with 527 during the previous reporting period. A total of 403 children, including 24 girls, escaped or were separated from armed groups. The main armed groups that recruited and used children were Kamuina Nsapu (102 cases), Mai-Mai Mazembe (68 cases), Raia Mutomboki (33 cases) and Twa militia (31 cases).

44. MONUSCO also verified the killing of at least 21 children and the maiming of 23; most of those violations were perpetrated by FRPI (8 killed and 6 maimed). Moreover, there were 51 documented cases of sexual violence against girls, committed by both State agents (FARDC: 14 cases; national police: 3 cases) and armed groups (Mai-Mai Simba: 13 cases, FRPI: 7 cases, Nduma défense du Congo-Renové: 7 cases). A total of 79 children were documented as having been abducted, most often by Mai-Mai Simba (21 cases) for purposes of recruitment. The Mission also verified 22 attacks against schools, FRPI having conducted half of those attacks, while FARDC was responsible for attacks against four schools.

Regional developments

45. A number of regional and subregional meetings of significance for the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were held during the reporting period.

46. In his closing statement to the thirty-seventh Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), held on 19 and 20 August in Pretoria, the new Chairperson, the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, emphasized that the Summit had taken note of the fact that it might not be possible to hold elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by December 2017, owing to a number of challenges. The SADC Heads of State and Government urged the Independent National Electoral Commission to publish a revised electoral calendar and approved the appointment by SADC of a Special Envoy to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who represented his country at the meeting, welcomed the support of SADC for the publication of a realistic electoral calendar. Several Congolese opposition figures and civil society actors criticized SADC for what some described as a lack of solidarity with the Congolese people on the part of the organization.

47. On 23 August, in Addis Ababa, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union held a session on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Peace and Security Council welcomed the decisions taken by the Heads of State and Government of SADC at the thirty-seventh Ordinary Summit, including the assessment that it would be unrealistic to hold elections by December; called on the international community to provide the Independent National Electoral Commission with the necessary resources; reaffirmed its commitment to the full implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016; and underlined that unilateral decisions to impose sanctions on personalities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would not create an environment conducive to the resolution of the crisis in the country.

48. On 26 July, in Kinshasa, the Minister of Public Security of Burundi, Alain Guillaume Bunyoni, held talks with senior Congolese government officials on possible joint strategies to curb insecurity along the border of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From 7 to 10 September, the Technical Support Committee of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework visited eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to assess progress on the neutralization of negative forces and the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of foreign combatants, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), and in finding a suitable solution for the relocation of elements of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A in Opposition), temporarily accommodated in a MONUSCO camp near Goma, North Kivu, and the repatriation and reintegration of former Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) members still cantoned in Rwanda and Uganda. The Technical Support Committee formulated recommendations, which are mentioned in my report on the implementation of the Framework.

III. Deployment of MONUSCO and implementation of its mandate

A. Progress in implementing recommendations on adjustments of Mission priorities, posture and presence

49. MONUSCO continued to adjust its posture and presence, in order to further align its footprint with the priorities laid out in resolution 2348 (2017), to seek greater efficiencies, and to accommodate budget reductions decided by the General Assembly for the 2017/18 financial year.

50. In improving the Mission's footprint, flexibility and mobility, one key change was the expansion and redrawing of the sector boundaries of the MONUSCO force to enable brigades in eastern provinces to redeploy and intervene more flexibly across both eastern and western provinces, by relying, inter alia, on rapidly deployable battalions. MONUSCO also took measures to enhance the mobility of the Intervention Brigade from its position in Beni, with various Intervention Brigade companies able to conduct operations throughout eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

51. MONUSCO continued to reinforce its presence in the three Kasai provinces, by bolstering the field office in Kananga, Kasai Central, and the sub-office in Mbuji-Mayi, Kasai Oriental, with civilian staff redeployed from elsewhere in the Mission area, and by establishing a sub-office and a subsector of the United Nations police force in Tshikapa, Kasai. Plans are also under way, in consultation with the concerned police-contributing countries, to relocate one formed police unit from the east to Kananga. The MONUSCO force has increased its presence in the Kasai region through the deployment of three companies in Kananga, Mbuji-Mayi and Tshikapa, enabling the rapid redeployment of five temporary standing combat deployments, if required.

52. The Mission also made significant adjustments in the light of reductions in its troop ceiling, as requested in resolution 2348 (2017) and in the light of the reduced budget. MONUSCO and Headquarters developed a plan of reductions that would best allow the Mission to continue prioritizing both the protection of civilians and the implementation of the agreement of 31 December 2016 and the electoral process as efficiently as possible. As a result, MONUSCO has repatriated 727 troops from North Kivu and is in the process of repatriating an additional 960 troops by 1 October. Further, MONUSCO seeks to generate three additional companies of special forces trained in jungle warfare from Intervention Brigade troop-contributing countries, to replace three companies being repatriated by November. The Mission is also generating savings by retaining a smaller footprint of individual police officers and civilian staff and through significant reductions across operational categories. These operational reductions include cuts to air support and cuts in fuel and rations support to national security forces.

53. There was no progress in the deployment, through inter-mission cooperation, of two additional formed police units.

54. The recently concluded strategic review of MONUSCO (see S/2017/826) will present further recommendations on adjustments to the Mission, which will inform the Security Council's decision on the present report and further discussion on the strategic dialogue with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on the exit strategy of MONUSCO.

B. Assessment of the performance of uniformed Mission personnel in protecting civilians

55. During the reporting period, there were no instances of underperformance by the MONUSCO force. This Mission continued to monitor and evaluate on a regular basis the performance of the force in identifying areas requiring improvement.

56. A majority of the formed police units were found to be operationally ready and appropriately trained. An evaluation conducted in July showed that a number of formed police units were operating with unserviceable or expired equipment provided by the police-contributing countries concerned. Aside from the issue of the

unserviceability of equipment, the formed police units were assessed to be performing generally well.

C. Preparations to address risks linked to the electoral process

57. MONUSCO continued its efforts to prevent and mitigate the risk of violence linked to the electoral process, including the risk of widespread violence in urban areas, maintaining and revising, where appropriate, its local protection contingency plans. The Mission retains, however, limited capacity to respond in the event of widespread violence, particularly in urban areas. At present, MONUSCO has two force infantry companies and two formed police units in Kinshasa. In urban areas with both force and formed police unit presence, the Mission continues to conduct joint patrols, with intensifying tempo and reach during moments of anticipated and actual unrest. The focus remains on prevention, as no additional MONUSCO troops or police officers would be able to significantly change the situation in the case of a major deterioration in security.

58. The Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued their good offices engagement with national political actors and key regional partners to encourage the swift implementation of the agreement of 31 December 2016, which would minimize further delays in the electoral process and the risk of further violence. MONUSCO and the Office of the Special Envoy also continued to advocate with the authorities for the swift implementation of the confidence-building measures enshrined in the political agreement, which would contribute to the creation of an environment conducive to the organization of free, fair, credible and peaceful elections.

59. MONUSCO continued its efforts to prevent electoral violence by reinforcing the capacity of its partners, including national authorities and security forces, to promote and protect fundamental freedoms and monitor human rights violations and restrictions on democratic space.

D. Protection of civilians and neutralization of armed groups

60. To mitigate the reduction of the footprint of the MONUSCO force as a result of the repatriation of one battalion, the Mission is adjusting its protection of civilians strategy, shifting from a "protection-by-presence" to a "protection-by-projection" approach, mostly in areas where MONUSCO bases are closing. In this context, MONUSCO reinforced its community alert networks, with an emphasis on Kasai Central. Community alert networks transmitted, on average, 486 early warning alerts per month, an average monthly increase of 170 alerts compared with the previous reporting period. Of all such alerts, 85 per cent resulted in a response by the Government and/or MONUSCO to protect civilians. Those not responded to were either in areas with limited State security deployment and capacity, or in areas with difficult access.

61. The concept of protection through projection currently under development requires a whole-of-mission effort. In North Kivu, MONUSCO relocated one Intervention Brigade company from Eringeti to Sake to increase its use throughout the country. MONUSCO also conducted a pilot operation led by the rapidly deployable battalion of North Kivu with the involvement of civilian teams, including women, with a view to testing the type of operations that could be undertaken in areas vacated by the repatriated battalion. Furthermore, community liaison assistants are now embedded in standing combat deployments and rapidly deployable battalions.

62. One Intervention Brigade company, one company from the Western Brigade and two companies from the rapidly deployable battalion of South Kivu were deployed to the Kasai region. United Nations police reinforced their presence in the Kasai region from 3 to 36 officers. In areas where MONUSCO has established a presence, a decline in protection threats and incidents was reported, while schools and health centres reopened and 70 per cent of the displaced population returned.

63. In Kasai Central Province, MONUSCO continued to support mediation efforts aimed at the peaceful resolution of customary conflicts, through capacity-building workshops with the Direction générale des affaires coutumières. MONUSCO also began rolling out its child protection action plan for Kasai through training sessions for FARDC on age assessments and the screening of new recruits.

64. In Tanganyika Province, the Mission supported efforts by provincial authorities and communities to set up a baraza, or intercommunal peace dialogue, to prevent violence between Twa and Luba communities in the Kabalo, Kalemie, Kongolo, Manono and Nyunzu territories.

65. From 12 to 22 July, MONUSCO conducted a joint investigation with judicial authorities following reports of human rights abuses by FDLR against civilians in Bunyakiri, South Kivu Province. The Mission confirmed the killing of 34 people, the wounding of 20, the fact that 7 others were missing and the destruction of more than 60 houses.

66. The United Nations Mine Action Service responded to 35 requests related to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts, as well as to police and military efforts, destroying 226 explosive remnants of war, 33,919 rounds of small arms ammunition and 319 weapons.

E. Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration

67. From 1 July to 7 August, MONUSCO received 44 Congolese male combatants, the majority of whom entered phase III of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. The Mission received and repatriated 46 foreign combatants to Rwanda and one foreign combatant to Burundi, most of them affiliated with the Forces combattantes abacunguzi.

68. The leader of Nduma défense du Congo, Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, who stands accused of crimes against humanity before national courts, surrendered to MONUSCO on 26 July, together with two of his associates. That event followed a long campaign of awareness-raising and endeavours to support the Government's efforts to facilitate Sheka's capture or surrender. Pursuant to an agreement with the Government, Sheka and his associates were handed over to national authorities at Ndolo prison, in Kinshasa.

69. MONUSCO continued its support for sustaining programme camps in Kamina and Kitona, where 458 ex-combatants are receiving vocational training, and the implementation of 37 community violence reduction projects with a projected number of 63,204 beneficiaries, composed mostly of young people at risk (53,820), as well as a core group of ex-combatants (5,160) in the programme and vulnerable women (4,224). Basic needs were also provided to 297 FDLR elements and 1,075 of their dependents in the voluntary disarmament programme camps of Kanyabayonga, North Kivu, and Walungu, South Kivu, and the Government-managed camp in Kisangani, Tshopo. Meanwhile, support was also provided to 577 SPLM/A in Opposition elements accommodated by MONUSCO in Munigi camp in Goma. MONUSCO continues to work on finding individual solutions for those in the camp.

F. Stabilization

70. Stabilization efforts continued within a context of political uncertainty, which is not conducive to achieving a sustainable impact. Nevertheless, MONUSCO supported the launching of two additional stabilization programmes in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces, in the framework of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy. Both programmes are financed through the Stabilization Coherence Fund, as part of a $27 million, multiple donor-funded budget for stabilization interventions in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, implemented by consortiums led by United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations. The development of compacts between the Mission and the provincial authorities in Ituri and South Kivu fostered enhanced engagement of the authorities in the implementation of the Support Strategy.

71. In the framework of the tailored stabilization strategy for South Irumu, Ituri, MONUSCO force and civilian components developed a joint strategy, aimed at increasing governmental commitment to identify a sustainable political solution to the FRPI threat. In the Kasai region, a joint assessment by MONUSCO and the authorities involved in stabilization activities identified community violence reduction programmes and dialogue as priorities for stabilization efforts.

72. Following mass escapes from prisons in Bukavu, Bunia, Bunyakiri, Kabare, Masisi, Nyuzu and Walungu, the national authorities, with the support of MONUSCO, adopted a plan to reinforce security in 38 prisons. MONUSCO advised prison staff on security regulations and advocated with the authorities for the reactivation of contingency plans. In addition, the Mission established an integrated prison security task force to comprehensively address prison security challenges from a political, protection and operational perspective. The United Nations police force continued to implement its operational strategy on the fight against insecurity in Beni, Bukavu, Bunia, Goma and Kalemie.

G. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

73. MONUSCO continued to enforce my zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, including through enhanced internal awareness-raising, the enforcement of strict curfew and out-of-bounds regimes, and military police deterrent patrols. The availability of toll-free hotlines, a dedicated email address and complaint drop boxes in MONUSCO facilities enhanced mechanisms for the reporting of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. One such allegation was recorded during the reporting period.

74. MONUSCO continued to conduct robust actions to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, with increased focus on community outreach activities through community-based complaint mechanisms. To ensure the timely, adequate and sustainable provision of support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, MONUSCO continued to work closely with its partners, including the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund. A system has also been put in place in close coordination with the Mission's Victims' Rights Advocate, to maintain contact with victims on a regular basis and to monitor the services provided to them by partners in order to ensure that their specific needs are met.

IV. Safety and security of United Nations personnel

75. Some 95 safety and security related incidents, affecting 10 female and 57 male United Nations personnel, as well as United Nations assets and operations, were

reported, compared with 142 in the previous period. These included 49 criminal incidents targeting both national and international staff, 4 cases linked to civil unrest, 33 hazard-related cases and 9 incidents related to armed conflict. MONUSCO support to FARDC operations against armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and ongoing confrontations in the Kasai region could lead to direct threats to United Nations personnel, programmes and installations, while the current political and socioeconomic dynamics also entail security implications.

76. In my letter to the President of the Security Council dated 15 August, I transmitted the executive summary of the report of the United Nations Security Management System Board of Inquiry on the critical security incident resulting in the deaths, in March, of two members of the Group of Experts in Kananga, Kasai Central (S/2017/713, annex). In the letter, I informed the Council of my intention to discuss with Congolese officials and consult with Council members regarding the establishment of a follow-on mechanism in connection with the deaths of the two experts. Following my initial consultations on 17 August in New York with the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, I dispatched a small team, led by my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, to Kinshasa to develop and agree on the modalities of United Nations support to the Congolese investigation into the deaths of the two experts. As agreed with the Congolese authorities and in connection with my letter dated 17 September 2017 to the Vice-Prime Minister, I intend to deploy, as soon as possible, a small team to assist the Congolese authorities in their investigations into the killing of the experts and to report regularly to the Security Council on those efforts.

V. Observations

77. The broad consensus achieved among key political actors with the signing of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement on 31 December 2016 provided the Congolese people with some hope that the significant gains achieved in stabilizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo in recent years could be maintained. That consensus is fast eroding and a climate of political uncertainty is gradually re-emerging. I am concerned that the relative respite in mounting political tensions achieved through the signing of the political agreement could lapse by the end of 2017, in the absence of a consensus on the political path forward. I therefore appeal to the signatories of the agreement and to the Government, which has a particular role to play by virtue of its sovereign responsibilities, to create the conditions necessary for the political process to move forward. Any failure to faithfully and fully implement the political agreement and end the transition period in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would only heighten the risk of a further escalation of the political crisis and a deterioration of the security situation, with dire consequences on the human rights and humanitarian situations in the country. The likely repercussions in the region would be grave. In this regard, the support of the United Nations alone, although vital, will not suffice. I urge regional and international actors, working in a coordinated and inclusive manner, to maximize their efforts to assist the Democratic Republic of the Congo in navigating the challenges it faces. A unified front around the importance of the swift and full implementation of the agreement, culminating in the early holding of credible and transparent elections, in keeping with the relevant provisions of the Constitution, is key to sustaining progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and avoiding a descent into instability and conflict, with far-reaching consequences for the people of the country, as well as for the region and beyond.

78. In the meantime, it is of critical importance that the Government, the Independent National Electoral Commission and the National Council for Monitoring the Agreement and the Electoral Process demonstrate the required political will to advance the electoral process, in the spirit of the agreement of 31 December 2016. I urgently call for the publication of a credible calendar for the holding of elections in as timely a manner as possible and in line with the provisions of the agreement.

79. I welcome the commencement in early September of preparations for voter registration in Kasai and Kasai Central Provinces and in the Kamiji and Luilu territories of Lomami Province and call upon the Commission to ensure that the voter registration process is brought to a swift and successful conclusion. I urge the Parliament to adopt the draft organic law on the organization and functioning of the National Council and to make the necessary amendments to the electoral law as soon as possible. I also encourage lawmakers to explore the possibility of increasing the representation of women during the deliberations on the amended electoral law, in line with the aspirations for gender parity enshrined in the Constitution.

80. The Government, the Commission and the National Council have a responsibility to ensure a level playing field for all political parties to prepare for, and participate in, the planned elections. That entails the full implementation of all the confidence-building measures stipulated in the political agreement, the opening of political space, and full respect for human rights, including freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly.

81. I am deeply concerned by the fragile security situation in several parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against the backdrop of continued political uncertainty. While ADF and FDLR have reduced their activities, increased and repeated targeted attacks by various — Mai-Mai groups and other armed elements on national security forces and symbols of State authority in North Kivu and South Kivu are a cause for concern. I am also concerned about the security situation in some areas of the western part of the country. I strongly condemn the attacks by the Kamuina Nsapu militia in the Kasai region and the acts of violence committed by the Bundu Dia Mayala elements in Kinshasa and Kongo Central. I urge the Government to exercise maximum restraint and abide by its human rights obligations in its efforts to restore security and I call on all actors to end the cycle of violence, particularly in the Kasai region.

82. Impunity only encourages more violence. I urge the authorities to take decisive measures to bring impunity to an end. Strong governmental action is required to bring to justice national police and FARDC elements involved in human rights violations, including those with command responsibilities at all levels.

83. The humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the Kasai region, is of grave concern. I call on donors to provide additional humanitarian funding to the flash appeal launched for the Kasai region and for the overall humanitarian response in the country. I urge the Government, in keeping with its responsibilities, to do its utmost to alleviate the suffering of the population, whose living conditions continue to deteriorate as a result of the economic downturn.

84. Lastly, I wish to thank my Special Representative, Maman Sidikou, for his leadership and all personnel of MONUSCO and the United Nations country team for their dedication to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also wish to thank my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, Said Djinnit, for his diplomatic efforts at the regional level. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to the troop- and police-contributing countries, as well as to the regional organizations, bilateral and multilateral partners and non-governmental organizations, for their invaluable support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

MONUSCO
September 2017
MONUSCO Headquarters
Force Forward Headquarters
Brigade Headquarters
Sector Headquarters
Formed Police Unit
Logistics base
Military Sector boundary
International boundary
Provincial boundary
National capital
0 100 200 300 km
0 100 200 mi
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SOUTH SUDAN
UGANDA
RWANDA
BURUNDI
UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
ZAMBIA
ANGOLA
CONGO
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Bangui
Brazzaville
Kinshasa
Kampala
Kigali
Bujumbura
Kindu
Kisangani
Lubumbashi
Kolwezi
Kananga
Mbandaka
Boende
Bandundu
Inongo
Matadi
Boma
Kasongo
Lusambo
Kabinda
Bukavu
Goma
Beni
Bunia
Isiro
Buta
Gbadolite
Mobaye
Bangassou
Businga
Gemena
Budjala
Lisala
Bumba
Basoko
Yangambi
Ubundu
Opala
Lubutu
Punia
Kibombo
Kasongo
Kongolo
Pepa
Moba
Pweto
Mutshatsha
Likasi
Solwezi
Sakania
Ndola
Kalemie
Makena
Kabalo
Lubao
Demba
Kamina
Kaniama
Kapanga
Musabira
Bukama
Dilolo
Kenge
Gungu
Feshi
Idiofa
Kikwit
Mbanza Ngungu
Mbanza Congo
Luozi
Cabinda (ANGOLA)
Ingende
Lukolela
Basankusu
Befale
Imfondo
Mbaiki
Libenge
Likati
Bondo
Ango
Dungu
Faradje
Aru
Mahagi
Nioka
Ituri
Bafwasende
Walikale
Shabunda
Fizi
Uvira
Baraka
Mwenga
Kalehe
Walungu
Kabare
Bukavu
Goma
Rutshuru
Masisi
Nyiragongo
Nyamulagira
Kalungu
Manono
Mitwaba
Pepa
Moira
Kyela
Chitipa
Karonga
Nkhata Bay
Mzuzu
Salima
Lilongwe
Mangochi
Blantyre
Chikwawa
Nsanje
Mwanza
Chipata
Petauke
Lundazi
Mpika
Kasama
Mbala
Nakonde
Isoka
Chinsali
Mansa
Samfya
Kawambwa
Mwense
Nchelenge
Kaputa
Mporokoso
Kasama
Luwingu
Mpulungu
Kalabo
Senanga
Sesheke
Livingstone
Kazungula
Choma
Monze
Mazabuka
Kalomo
Zimba
Kariba
Siavonga
Chirundu
Lusaka
Kafue
Chongwe
Luangwa
Petauke
Chipata
Mambwe
Nyimba
Katete
Lundazi
Chadiza
Mchinji
Kasungu
Nkhotakota
Dedza
Ntcheu
Mangochi
Balaka
Zomba
Machinga
Mulanje
Phalombe
Thyolo
Chiradzulu
Blantyre
Chikwawa
Nsanje
Mwanza
Neno
Mwanza
Chiradzulu
Thyolo
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Balaka
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Dedza
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Kasungu
Nkhotakota
Salima
Lilongwe
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Rumphi
Chitipa
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Nkhata Bay
Mzuzu
Likoma
Chilumba
Mbeya
Tukuyu
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Ileje
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Chunya
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Mbarali
Chimala
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